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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #4162/01 3571350
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 231350Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4981
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0459

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004162

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2017
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY/PKK: STOPPING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker. Reasons: 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Turkish military airstrikes against PKK targets in the Qandil Mountains December 16 and the subsequent December 17/18 crossing of Turkish infantry in pursuit of KRG elements were successful in demonstrating that PKK terrorism will not be tolerated either by the Turks or the U.S. However, the scope of the attacks, absence of adequate notification of the government of Iraq, and uncertainty in the KRG about the U.S. role have put the GOI in a difficult position and caused KRG leaders to publicly show their anger with the U.S. To keep the Iraqis on our side in the effort to end the PKK's terrorist activities, and to protect our own equities with the Kurds, we need to focus on political steps that will bring Turkish and Iraqi, including KRG officials, into a dialogue on this issue. This becomes particularly important as Iraq enters a very important period during which the focus needs to be on legislation rather than on issues with the Turks and PKK. END SUMMARY.

Turkish Airstrikes: Effects in Iraq

¶2. (S) Iraqis took the immediate purpose of the Turkish airstrikes against PKK targets December 16 and cross-border movement of infantry December 17/18 to be the long-expected retaliation for early October PKK ambushes that cost the lives of Turkish soldiers. The numbers of planes involved, the attacks continuing for three consecutive days and targeting of villages which were literally "outside the box" in the Southern Qandil Mountains conveyed the ability and willingness of the Turks to carry out attacks when and wherever they desired. Likewise, it is now clear to all that the traditional lull in TGS and PKK actions dictated by winter is no longer a given, a notion re-enforced by the December 22 airstrikes in the Zap region.

¶3. (S) Iraqis also took away from the events and public statements by Turkish officials that intelligence-sharing with the U.S. played a significant role in the attacks. Mixed public messages on whether the Turks benefited from intelligence specific to the airstrikes (which did not, in fact, happen), when the U.S. was notified and whether clearing the airspace counts as supporting the operation, have also left some with the impression that the U.S. "approved" the attacks.

¶4. (S) Though early public statements by the PKK and KRG politicians of civilian casualties appear to be greatly exaggerated, it is clear that there were some, though how many remains undetermined. There also have been reports of destruction of a school building and perhaps some residences, as well as the evacuation of over 1,000 Kurds from the area of attack.

Impact in Iraq

15. (S) The Maliki government, which has up to now been willing to actively work with us on a program of putting pressure on the PKK, was put in a delicate position by the public discussion of U.S. association with the strikes, reports of civilian casualties and howls of outrage from members of the COR. Speaking on the eve of Secretary Rice's arrival here, the PM chose to say as little as he could politically get away with. He called the death of a civilian "unacceptable" and publicly announced he was sending a written protest to the Government of Turkey. Foreign Minister Zebari told us that he was intentionally trying to modulate Iraqi reaction, but characterized the Turkish actions, including the fact that there was no contact with the GOT, even after the strikes, as definitely "pushing the envelope."

16. (S) In conversations with the Ambassador directly and others via his Chief of Staff, KRG President Massoud Barzani said he regarded the scale and geography of the strikes and Turkish statements about them as indications of Turkish intentions that went beyond the limited goal of punishing the PKK. He was particularly galled that the attacks took place just a few days after what he considered to be very constructive talks with visiting TNIO chief Taner. That he not only chose to boycott the December 18 leadership gathering in Baghdad on the occasion of the Secretary's visit but went so far as to announce publicly he was doing so was a clear indication of the depth of his anger with the U.S. We understand that KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani, widely considered to be more practical than his uncle, was prohibited by Massoud from boarding the plane MNF-I sent to bring him to Talabani's lunch for the Secretary.

17. (S) We expect that after a cooling off period Massood

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will return to doing business with us, but his reaction should be taken as a warning that recent events brought us perilously close to putting our core interests here in jeopardy. For example, we only recently succeeded, due to flexibility on the part of the Kurds, in arriving at agreement to deferring a referendum on the status of Kirkuk, which, had it been carried out on schedule, would have risked a dramatic reaction on the part of the city's now-minority Arab population. Kurdish flexibility will also be needed if we are to succeed in getting a hydrocarbon law passed, while Kurdish support is necessary for the passage of virtually any other of our legislative benchmarks. With the recent experience of negotiating the Strategic Partnership Declaration behind us, it is clear we are going to need solid Kurdish support if we are to be successful.

The Way Forward: Breaking the Cycle of Violence

18. (S) It is clear that a continuing cycle of PKK attacks and Turkish retaliation is in no one's interest. To avoid getting trapped in such a cycle, we need to look at ways to get the Turks talking to the Iraqis directly about how to end PKK violence. Embassy Ankara has reported on a number of initiatives we agree should be pursued and the sooner the better.

19. (S) The proposed visit by Turkish Deputy Chief of Defense Saygun to Iraq would be a good first step. In addition to meeting with the MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus, Saygun should meet with GOI officials, including PM Maliki and MOD Abdul Qadr. This could be followed by engagement between officials of the two governments, hopefully with KRG representatives included on the GOI side. President Talabani has told us that despite recent events he is still willing to travel to Ankara, an offer that should be taken up as soon as feasible. Ultimately, we would hope to get a trilateral mechanism restarted where more difficult issues, such as the repatriation of the residents of the Mahmour refugee camp, could be addressed. In the meantime, it is important to

consider the unintended effects of U.S. support to the Turks
on our ability to achieve political progress in Iraq.
CROCKER